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NSPG DISCUSSION PAPER: CLOSING BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

I. The Beirut International Airport (BIA) continues to pose a serious threat to international air traffic. The facility has been used for over 15 percent of all aviation-related terrorist incidents since 1970. Unless the airfield is closed to commercial air traffic, it will remain a potential location for launching terrorist operations or a place to which a hijacked aircraft can be delivered. As soon as our citizens are clear of the BIA vicinity, we should act to ensure that BIA is no longer usable as a terrorist base.

II: Considerations

-- Assumption: partial release of hostages.

-- Object:

- o to prevent BIA's use as terrorist sanctuary.
- o opening step in sustained global campaign to put terrorists on defensive and reduce their capabilities.
- o transfer to Syria responsibility for the movement of aviation-related commerce to and from Lebanon, so it can bring to justice those terrorists who have committed crimes against U.S. citizens.

-- Criteria:

- o Need to avoid squandering political capital needed (especially with Europeans) to forge ahead with broader anti-terrorism campaign.
  - Should not look like U.S. lashing out in impotent frustration. International community should be impressed with our tough but methodical approach.
- o Want to avoid letting it look like anti-Shia, anti-Lebanon, or anti-Arab action.
  - If possible, closure should be Lebanese action.
  - Impress on Barri that BIA is threat to his interests; hijackings benefit Hizballah.
  - Any military action must carefully avoid Shia slums adjoining BIA.

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-- Other considerations:

o Need to consider how fast to move. Could go through motions below in 4-5 days. May take longer to shape international opinion.

- Steps below could be completed within four to seven days.

o May need to consider repeated military action.

- If Shia see BIA as "resistance" issue, any damage can be repaired in days.

o Could endanger remaining hostages.

II. Steps to Closure

1. Public statements by President and other senior U.S. officials stressing that BIA is a pirate haven and must be closed.

2. Rescind MEA landing rights.

o Unilateral U.S. action.

o Urge global ban on MEA via IATA, ICAO, pilots association, bilateral contacts, etc.

o Consider unilateral U.S. withdrawal of landing rights for any airline not observing global ban on MEA.

3. Demarche to Gemayel: Charge Government of Lebanon with the responsibility for shutting BIA down and keeping it closed. If Lebanon cannot, then civilized world must.

o Parallel blunt approaches to Barri and Syrians.

4. Publicly announce our approaches to Lebanese and Syrians, and our expectations that BIA will be closed.

5. Surgical night air strike, designed for low-risk and minimal collateral damage.

o Simultaneous demarches to Soviets, Allies, other concerned parties.

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6. Follow-up

- Presidential speech providing rationale, as well as commitment to assist in reopening airport when terrorist threat ameliorated.

- Demarches to Lebanese and Syrians: we expect airport to stay closed.

- Possible additional attacks on BIA and other terrorist infrastructure targets throughout Middle East to underscore sustained campaign against terrorism.

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MEMORANDUM

SYSTEM II
90706

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

SECRET

RECOMMENDED TELEPHONE CALL

TO: His Excellency Hafiz al-Assad,
President of the Syrian Arab Republic

DATE: Monday, June 24, 1985

RECOMMENDED BY: National Security Planning Group (NSPG)

PURPOSE: To directly convey to President Assad our belief that he can assist in the release of AMCITs being held in West Beirut.

BACKGROUND: Assad is meeting today with Iran's Rafsanjani and Nabih Berri. Gorbachev apparently asked Assad to use his influence with Berri to end the hijacking "because the U.S. and Israel are planning a major military operation in Lebanon." According to information circulating within the PLO, Gorbachev also warned Berri of U.S. military action. Gorbachev reportedly told both Assad and Berri that the USSR would not get involved, but advised both to end the crisis. Today, Berri announced at a press conference a new demand: that U.S. naval forces off Lebanon had to be "removed" before the AMCITS could be released.

A straightforward approach to Assad may be our best (and perhaps our last) hope for resolving the situation in the near term. By informing Assad that we expect him to take positive action, we serve notice that he bears responsibility for any next steps we may have to take.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

1. It has come to my attention that Mr. Berri and speaker Rafsanjani have been meeting with you in Damascus.

2. In our earlier exchanges, I made absolutely clear the importance the American people attach to the immediate release of our citizens.

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TOPICS
OF DISCUSSION: (Continued...)

3. Ten days have passed and I do not see that my people's freedom is at hand. In fact, Mr. Berri seems to be escalating the demands. Mr. President, I and the American people have limits. We will not wait forever to resolve this problem.

4. You have recently demonstrated your ability to resolve decisively the violent conflicts between Amal and the Palestinians in Beirut. I expect you to use all your influence to resolve this problem as well.

5. (CONTINGENCY) If the on-going diplomatic process does not yield freedom for our citizens, the United States will take other measures.

Date of Submission:

Action

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